

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR METH HEARING
March 3, 2005

I want to welcome everyone here this morning for a hearing on one of the most disturbing trends in contemporary culture – the growing abuse of methamphetamines, or meth.

Meth is a particular menace because it combines characteristics that are not usually exhibited by a single drug. Abused drugs tend either to be cheap, but not so potent; or highly potent, but relatively expensive. But meth is a powerful, addictive and deadly drug that is also inexpensive to buy or to make and is readily accessible. Worse still, it is destroying families and communities in areas that have been somewhat immune to the worst of the nation's previous drug epidemics. What the crack epidemic was to the nation's cities, the meth epidemic is to our rural areas.

Unfortunately, I have been able to witness this in my own District. While New York has not been a center of meth abuse, the problem is growing exponentially. And Tioga County in my District has seen more meth lab busts than any other county in the State. We have Tioga County's sheriff, Gary Howard, with us today, and I know he will describe the devastation this is causing.

There are many aspects of the meth problem, and many things that must be done to combat it – strengthening law enforcement, improving treatment, and broadening education programs, to name a few. But there is another insidious aspect of meth, and that's its environmental effects, which can harm individuals who have no connection whatsoever with making or using the drug.

It's that aspect of the meth problem that falls in our jurisdiction and that we will focus on today.

The manufacture, or "cooking" of meth uses readily available, but highly dangerous chemicals. That toxic brew can spread its own devastation as firefighters are exposed to it, as chemicals are dumped into the environment, as new people move into the site of former meth labs.

But we know very little about how much damage results from this aspect of the meth problem, or about how to clean up and remediate former meth labs. States are struggling with this problem with little information.

That's why I was pleased to be an original co-sponsor on the bill Mr. Gordon and Mr. Calvert introduced, H.R. 798, which takes aim at this problem. It is a sensible, targeted bill that we have all worked together on, and I hope we can report it out of Committee later this month.

The bill would bring the resources and expertise of the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Standards and Technology to bear on the environmental aspects of the meth problem. States would then have some guidance as they decide how to protect first responders, and how to clean up and remediate meth labs.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses today, including my two fellow New Yorkers. And I look forward to seeing this bill move forward rapidly.

I want to yield the remainder of my time to Mr. Calvert, the co-sponsor of H.R. 798. I congratulate him on his leadership on this issue.